



Why So Blue?

Crucial, vibrant, beautiful cobalt: one writer's tribute to an ocean hue **BY PEGGY PAYNE**

IF COLORS COULD GET OSCARS, ONE BRILLIANT SPLASH would dominate, year after year. Imagine: "For special effects, the Oscar goes to ... cobalt!" From the celebrity audience rises a supermodel-tall typhoon of color; she whirls across the stage. Awed presenters step back. Cobalt needs no microphone. From deep within her spinning vortex comes a bell-like voice: "I want to thank the ocean, and the amazing sky. And a few gorgeous flowers—you know who you are."

Cobalt seems to thrum with mysterious power, which is the reason, I'm convinced, that this deep, rich blue turns up again and again as a—or *the*—color of any season. There's no other that gives off such a radiant, almost mystical aura or that has such eerie chemistry. Certainly there are other admirable hues—tangerine, emerald—having their brief moments, and you can no doubt argue well on behalf of your own favorite. But cobalt is the one that persistently draws a crowd and holds an uncanny attraction.

it becomes radioactive and is used to treat cancer. Small amounts are important for health; large amounts are poison. It is both crucial and lethal, and beautiful.

Its vibrancy gives it a spiritual aura, from High Church to New Age. It is "a divine color," said Vincent Van Gogh, who used it liberally in his famous *Starry Night*. And of course, with its alchemical response to light, it's a staple of stained glass. Those who ferret out or assign psychological meanings typically say it's the color of clarity and truth.

But, truly, no ferreting is needed. We have only to look. One bit of blue sea glass alone convinces me that this is the color of beauty, truth, clarity, magic. Cobalt reflects the very spirit of the shore.

Peggy Payne's previous novel, Sister India, was on The New York Times list of notable books. Her third novel, Cobalt Blue, was released in March 2013.